

A PLACE FOR GRACE



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BY Jean Davies Okimoto ILLUSTRATED BY Doug Keith

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A PLACE FOR GRACE

Grace is a little dog with big dreams. She longs to be a seeing-eye dog, but is disappointed when she finds that she is too small for guide dog school. Grace isn't discouraged for long, though. She's discovered by Charlie, a deaf man who sees her perform a remarkable rescue and who knows a way she can use her eagerness and courage to help other people.

Charlie takes Grace to a hearing dog program, where she learns the skills dogs need to assist the hearing impaired throughout the day. School is difficult for Grace, but thanks to the flexibility of Mrs. Lombardi, the program director, and Charlie's encouragement, Grace finally succeeds in her own inimitable way.

A Place for Grace introduces children to the challenges of the hearing impaired and gives them the opportunity to see how people communicate through American Sign Language. Charlie uses some creative problem-solving to help Grace complete the hearing dog program; her struggles, hard work, and ultimate triumph make Grace an inspiring model for children facing obstacles in school and family life.



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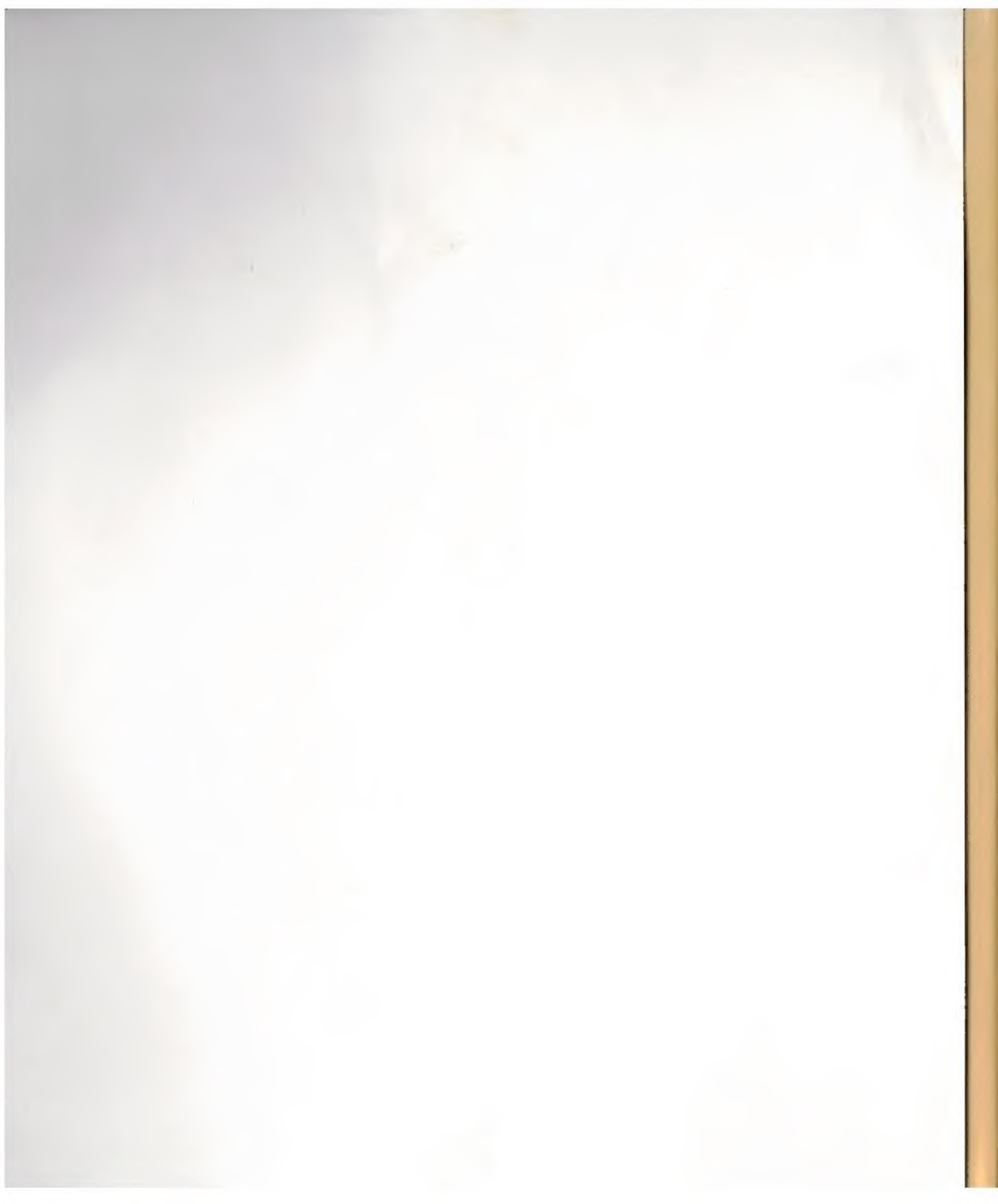


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ILLUSTRATED BY
Doug Keith



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To Katie and Sarah

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To Beth and Corie Lyn

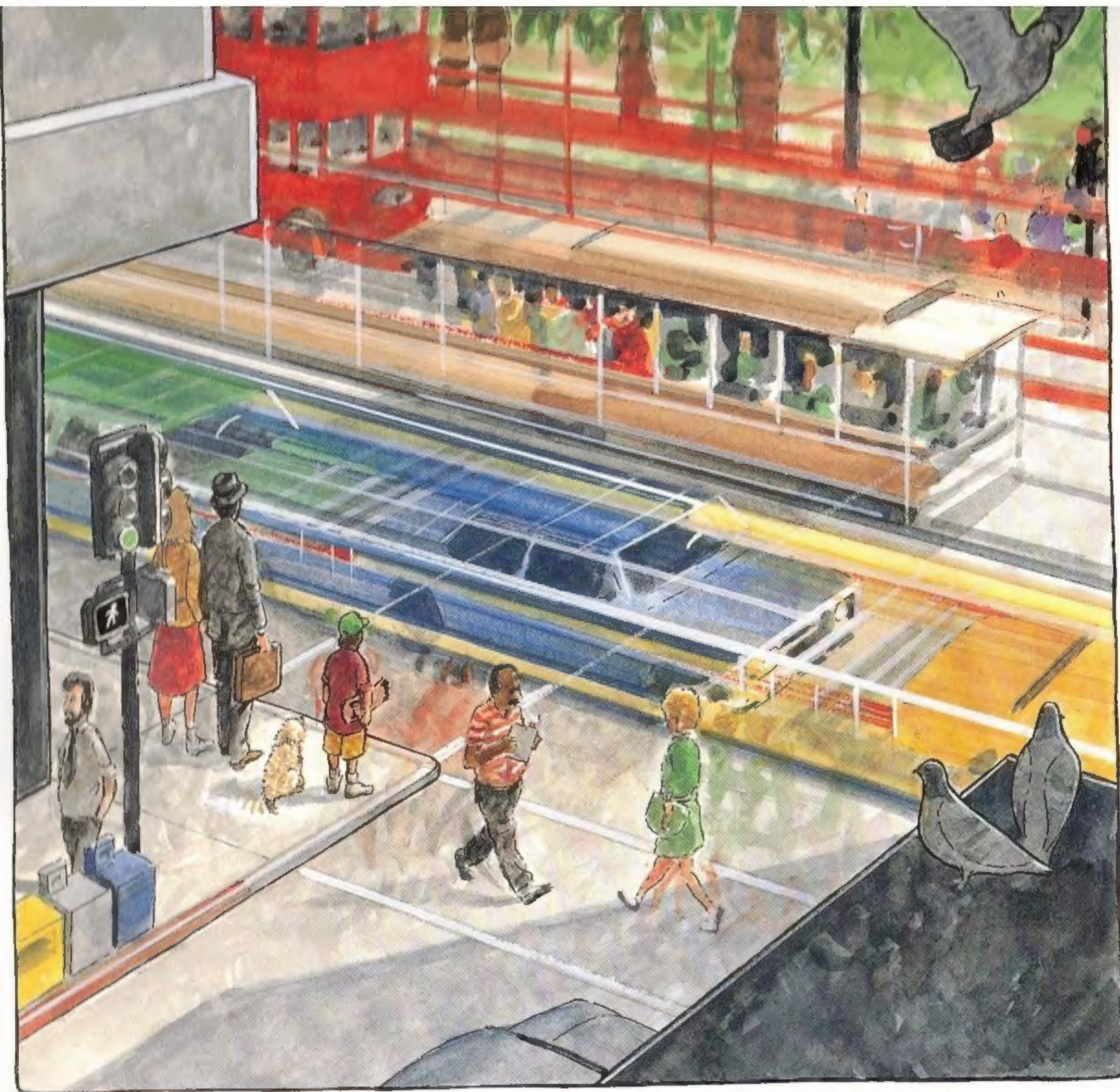
— D.K.



“Someday that will be me,” dreamed Grace. “When I grow up, I’ll be known as Grace: Amazing Guide Dog for the Blind.”



“I will guide my owner with sure, strong steps. I will be brave, loyal, and true. I might even end up in the Animal Hall of Fame.”

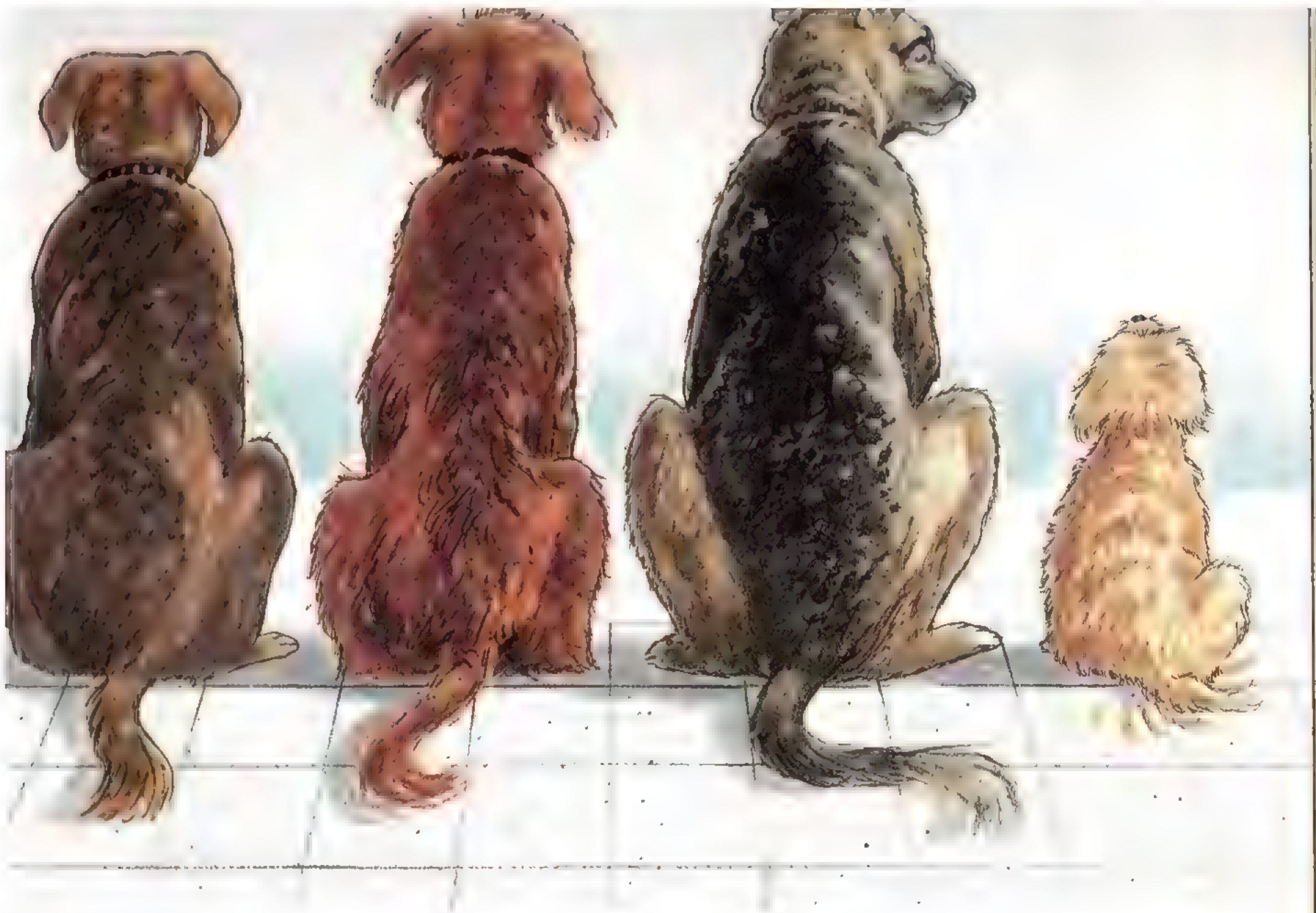


“But I must be prepared for guide dog school,” Grace decided. “I will practice.”

Grace sat and studied the traffic. She looked both ways and crossed when it was clear. She practiced at the corner of Geary and Powell, she practiced on the corner of Pine and Grant. She even practiced at Ghirardelli Square.



Finally September came, and Grace was ready for school. "This is my big moment," she said to herself.



Grace found a place at the end of the row. She paid perfect attention as the trainer read the roll. "Abraham L., Eleanor R., Harriet T., Winston C., Colin P., Grace . . . Grace? GRACE!"



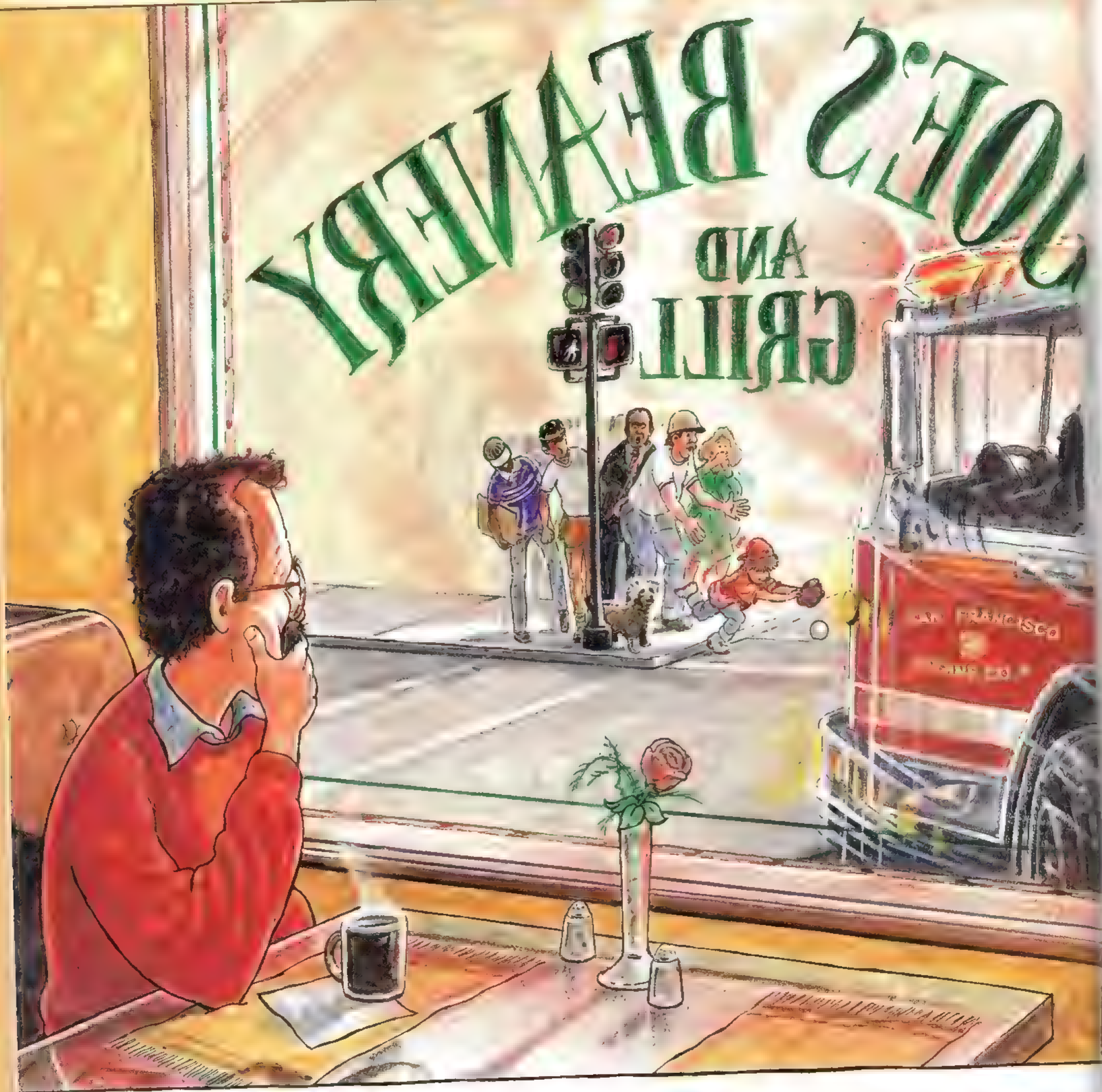
The trainer marched over to Grace. "The students here must be twenty inches tall. You, little dog, are much too small!"

Poor Grace.





She sat at the corner, wondering what to do.



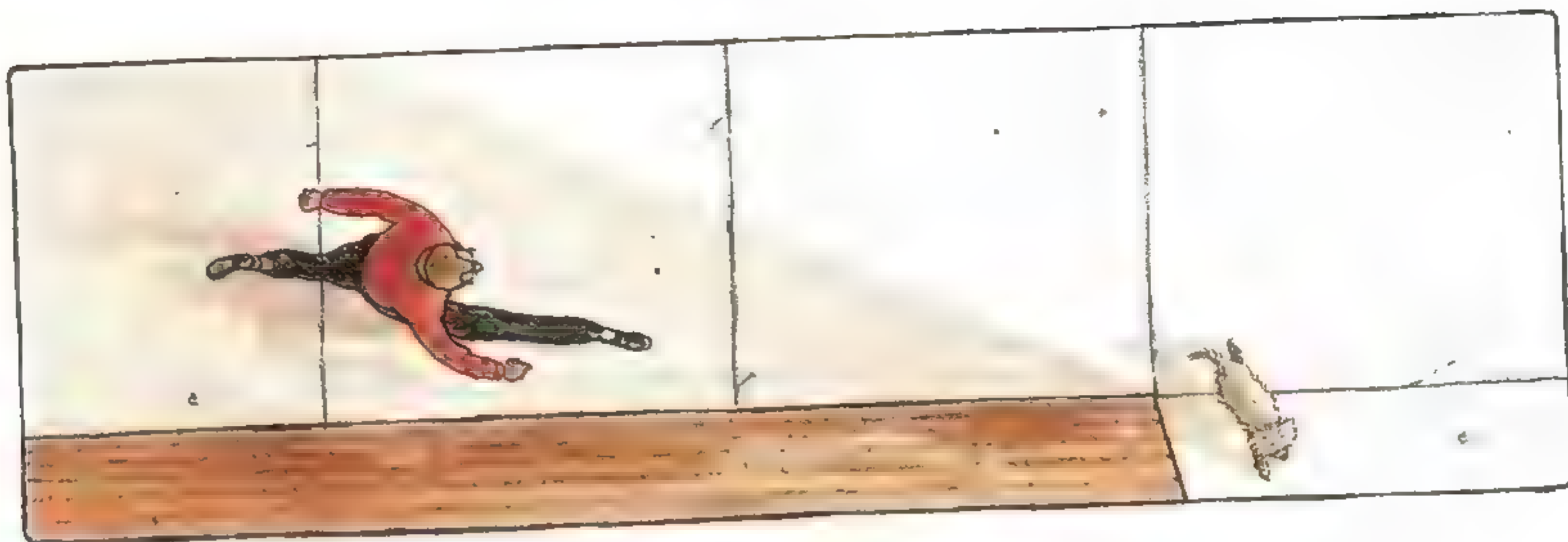
Suddenly she heard the scream of a siren. Everyone stopped. Everyone except the boy with the ball!



Grace leaped through the air and knocked the boy back to the curb. . . . Safe!

Grace didn't know, but someone special had been watching.

"I must get that dog," thought the man named Charlie.



But just as Charlie raced down the street, the Animal Control van appeared. Usually Grace was an expert at running away from the blue-and-white van . . . but not today.



Charlie was too late. Grace was caught!

Charlie rushed to the office of the Hearing Dog Program. "Mrs. Lombardi," Charlie signed, "today I saw a dog with the right stuff. She'd be a perfect student for your school. But she's landed in the pound."



"Are you quite sure she's hearing-dog material?" signed Mrs. Lombardi.

"From what I just saw, I'd bet on this dog," he replied.

"This is most unusual, Charlie, but I know you're tired of waiting for a hearing dog. I suppose we could give her a try."





Mrs. Lombardi and Charlie went to the Animal Control Shelter. They quickly found Grace and sprung her from the cage.

Charlie held Grace. Grace licked his face. "I must say, it seems to be love at first sight," signed Mrs. Lombardi. "But it will all depend on how she does in school."



The next day, Charlie fixed Grace a nice big breakfast. She liked the breakfast, but most of all she liked the man who talked with his hands.



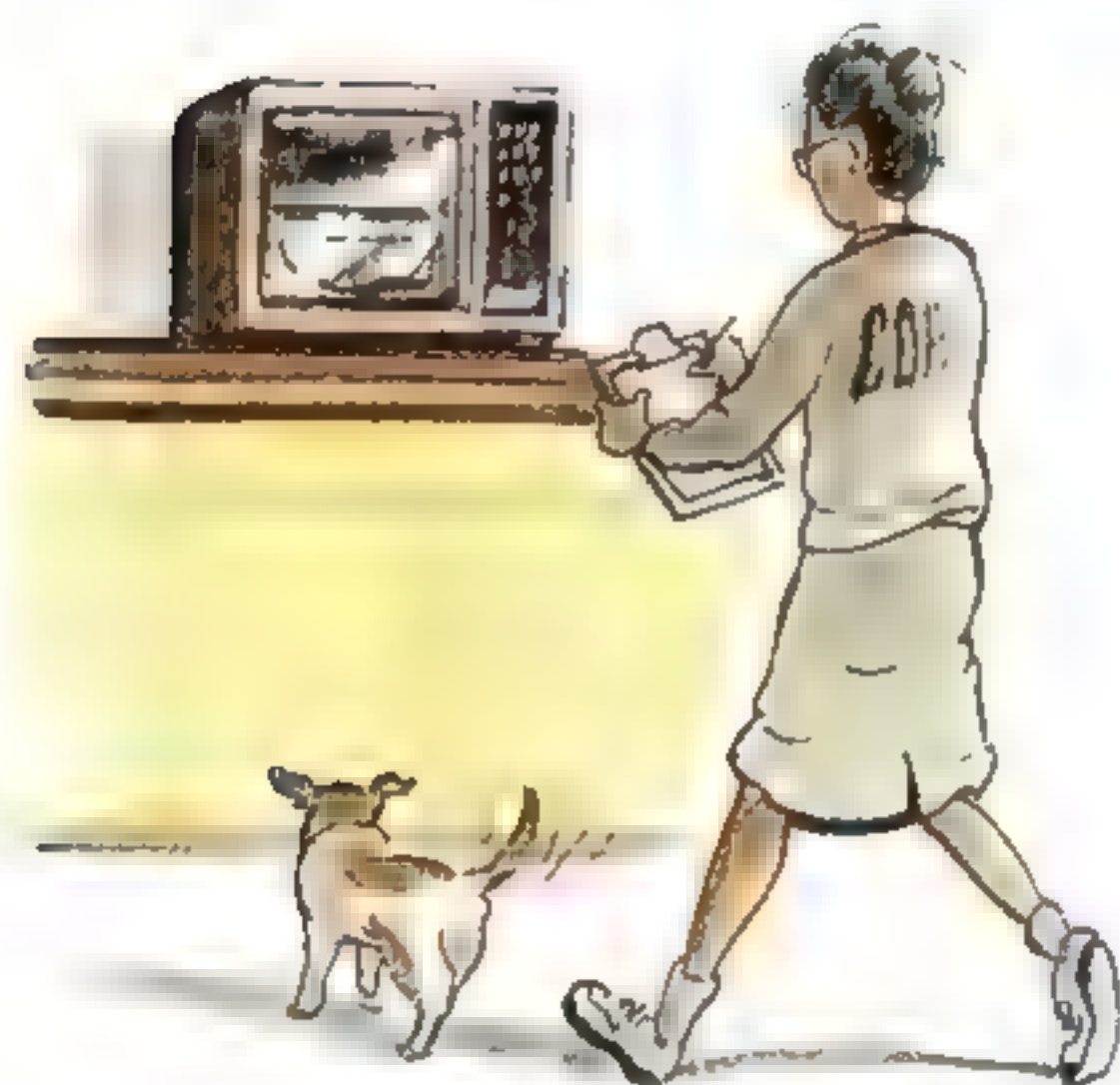
“Good luck and study hard,” Charlie signed. He hugged her good-bye and dropped her off in front of the school.

“Hearing dogs must be small and sprightly. When you hear certain sounds, you must jump lightly,” said Mrs. Lombardi.

“This is the school for me,” thought Grace. “I will be brave, loyal, and true to Charlie. Soon I’ll be known as Grace: Amazing Hearing Dog!”



Wake Up was the first class. The dogs were taught to wake their owners. They jumped on them when the alarm clock rang.



Microwave was the next class. When the microwave beeped, they learned to lead to the kitchen.

Then came Phone Class. They learned to jump and lead at the sound of the TDD, a special phone for deaf people.



In Doorbell Class, they were taught to jump and lead to the door.

Smoke Alarm Class was the most important. When the smoke alarm screeched, they learned to leap and leap and leap.



"How's Grace doing?" Charlie asked after six weeks.

"Not very well," signed Mrs. Lombardi. "She has an A in Smoke Alarm and Phone, but when the microwave beeps she runs to the door, and when the doorbell rings she runs to the microwave."

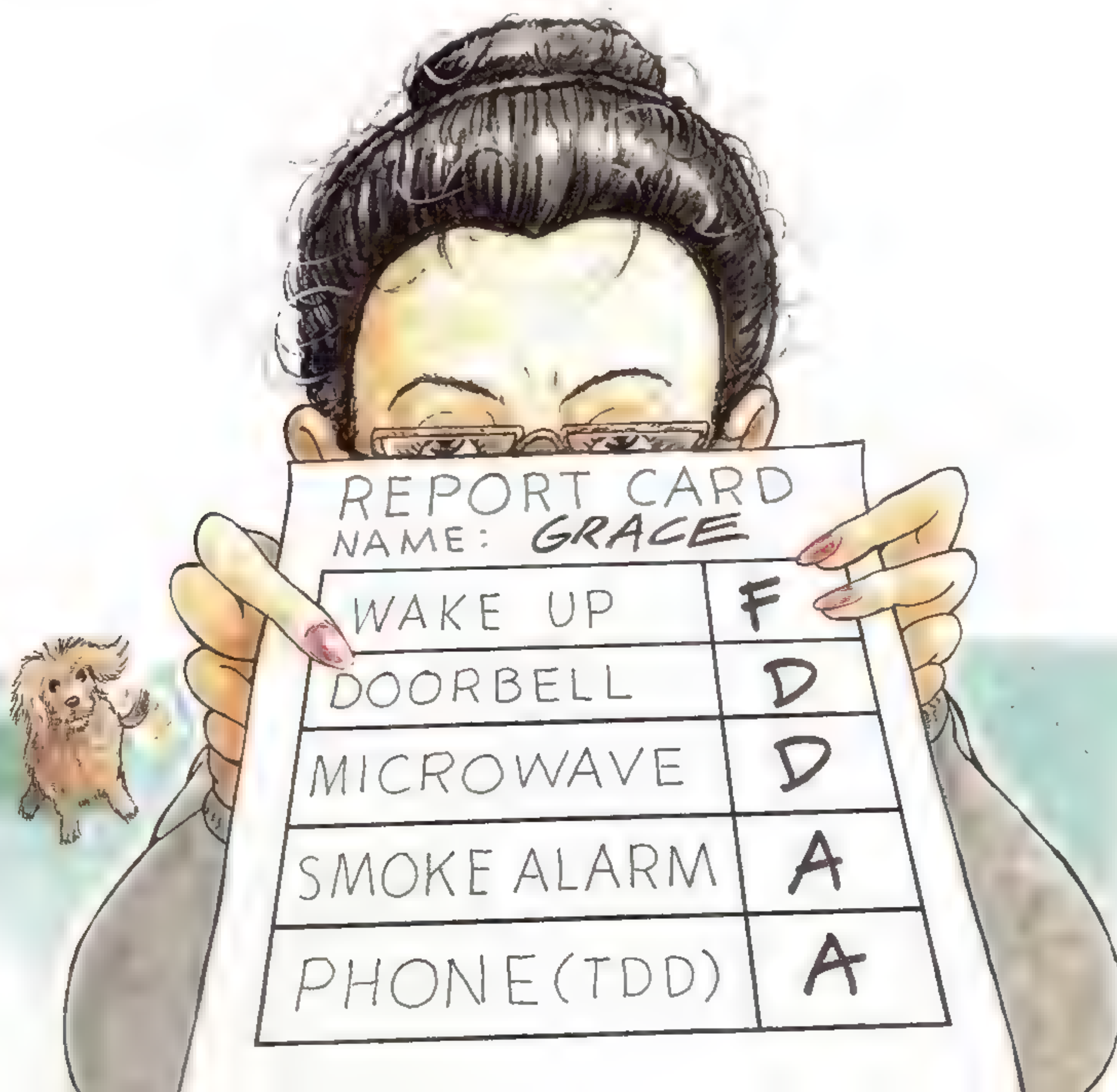
"What about Wake Up?" Charlie asked.

"She flunks."

"What does she do?"

"She jumps on the bed and goes to sleep. We'll have to send Grace back to the pound," continued Mrs. Lombardi.

"She will make someone a nice pet. But Grace simply doesn't have what it takes to make it here."





“We have a splendid new student who can be your hearing dog. Louis is at the top of his class—he leads to the door in three seconds flat! Truly outstanding!”



Charlie looked at Louis,
then he looked at Grace.

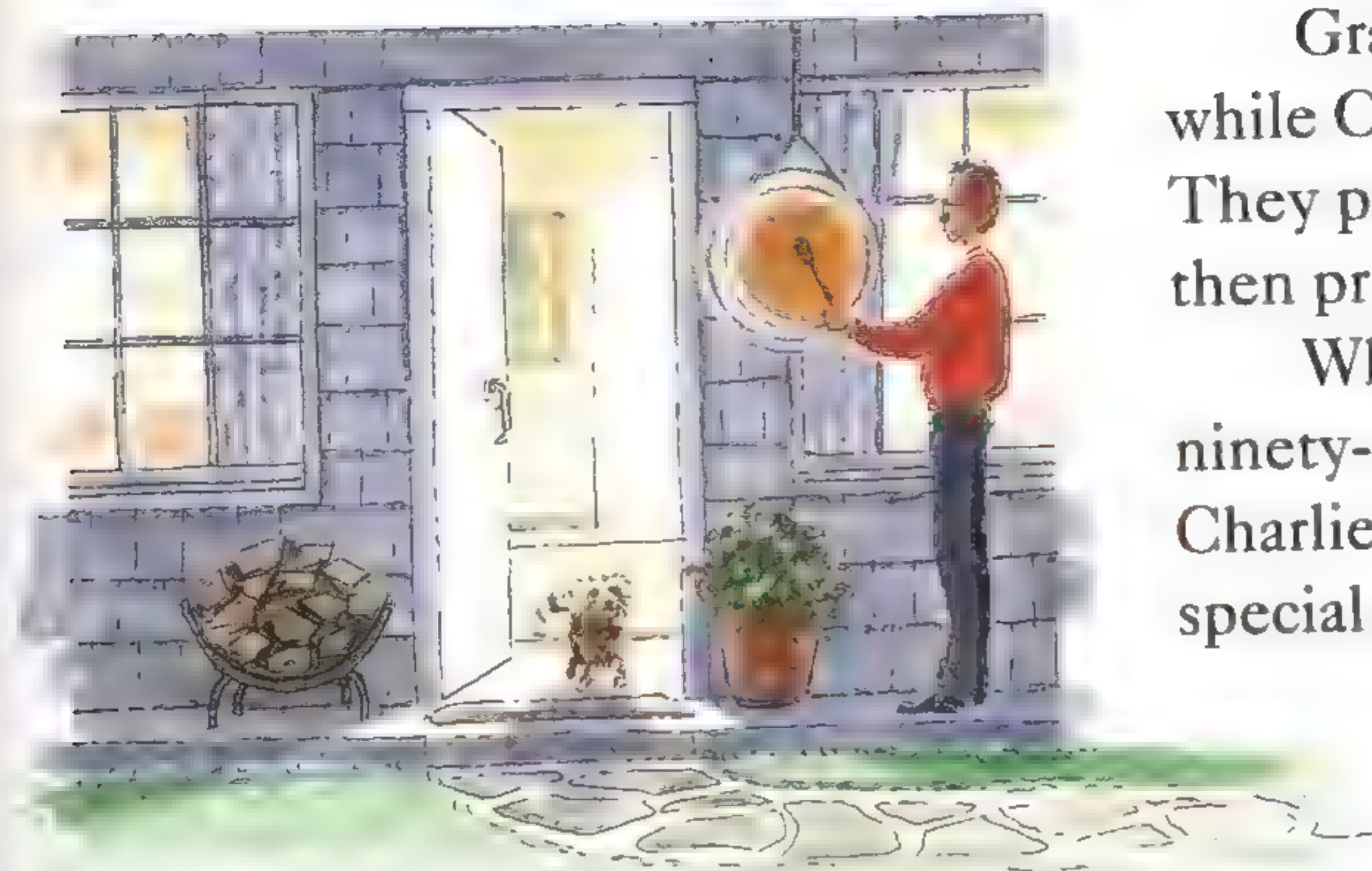
Grace growled at Louis.

“She can’t quit yet,” signed
Charlie. “I’m sure Grace just
needs some extra help.”





“Grace, this doorbell will never sound like a microwave beep,” signed Charlie, after he bought a gong from his friend Eric Eng.



Grace listened carefully while Charlie bonged the gong. They practiced and practiced, then practiced some more.

When Grace got it right ninety-six gongs in a row, Charlie made a call on his special phone.

“Mrs. Lombardi,” he typed, “please come and give Grace another chance.”



“This is highly irregular,” Mrs. Lombardi typed back, “but since you insist, I’ll give her the test.”



Grace passed Phone and Smoke Alarm. Then Mrs. Lombardi went to the kitchen and set the microwave.

Beep-beep, went the oven. Grace jumped on Charlie and led him straight to the kitchen.

Next, Mrs. Lombardi went to the door and hit Charlie's gong. There was no mistaking the bong for a beep! Grace jumped on Charlie, then led right to the door.



“The last test is Wake Up,” signed Mrs. Lombardi. Charlie got in bed. Mrs. Lombardi set the alarm. *Riiinnnnng!* went the clock. Grace jumped on the bed.



Grace went to sleep.

“It’s too bad Grace didn’t pass,” signed Mrs. Lombardi on her way out the door. “But you can still have our top dog, Louis . . . the best and the brightest.”

“I’ll never give up on Grace,” signed Charlie.



The next day, Charlie called Mrs. Lombardi on the special phone. “I bought a new clock. I’m sure now that Grace can pass!”

"I hope this isn't a waste of time," signed Mrs. Lombardi, as Charlie set the clock and got in bed.



Riiiiing! went the clock. Grace jumped on Charlie and licked his face. Charlie tapped the top of the clock. Grace snuggled next to Charlie and began to snooze. Charlie snoozed, too.

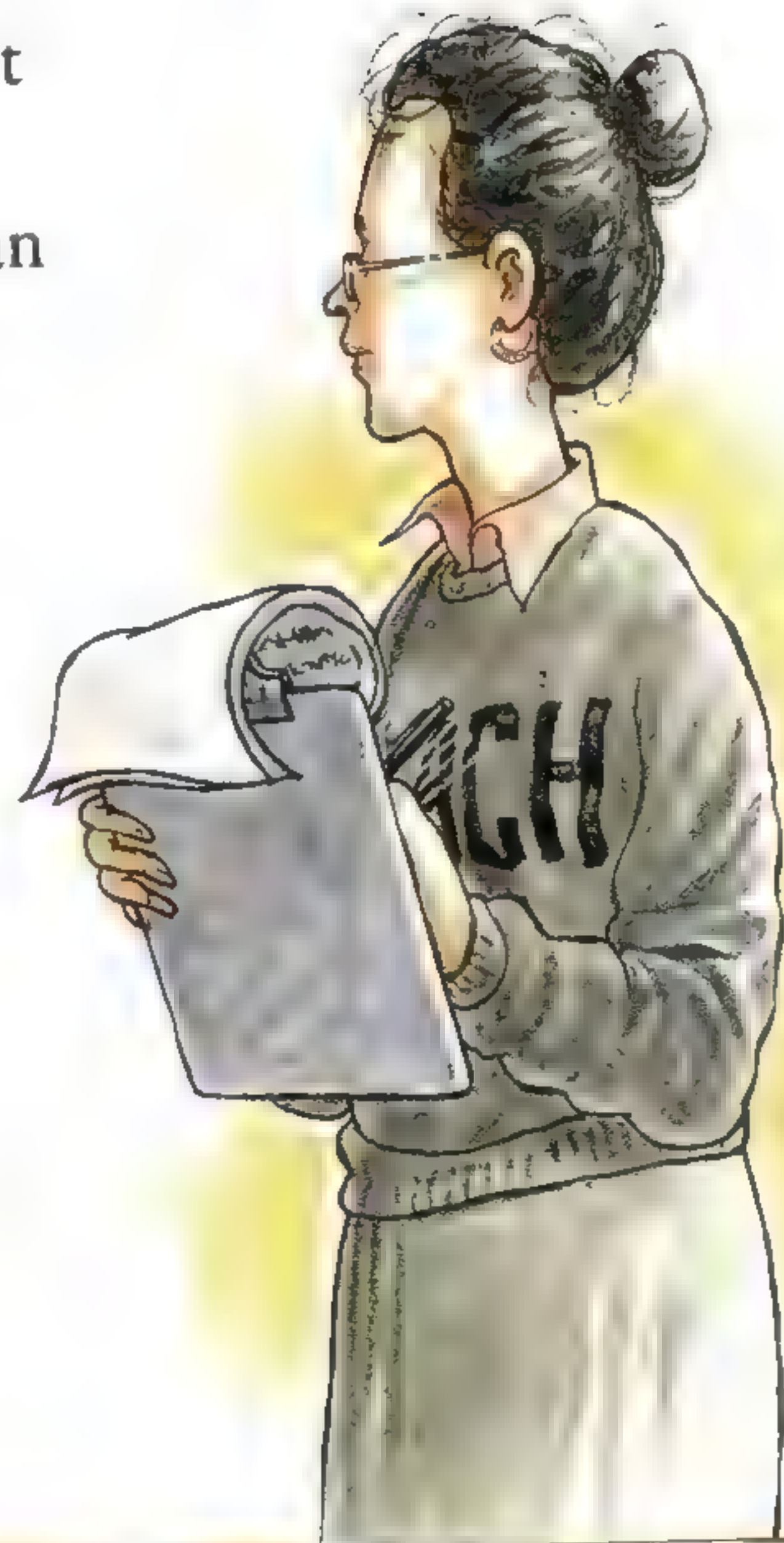
Riiiiing! went the clock. Grace sat up and licked Charlie's face. Charlie tapped the top of the clock. They snuggled and snoozed some more.



Riiiiing! Grace sat up and licked Charlie's face. Charlie tapped the top of the clock. "We can't lie here all day, Grace," he signed, and they jumped out of bed.



"This is most unusual," signed Mrs. Lombardi, "but Grace here seems to be a snooze alarm. I guess we can say she's passed the class."





Graduation day came. Grace sat on the stage with the rest of the students. They wore bright orange coats that proclaimed they were hearing dogs. Everyone cheered and cheered.

After the ceremony the owners came up and got their dogs. Charlie held Grace. Grace licked his face.

“It’s time to come home and take your place,” Charlie signed, “my official hearing dog . . . snooze-alarm Grace.”



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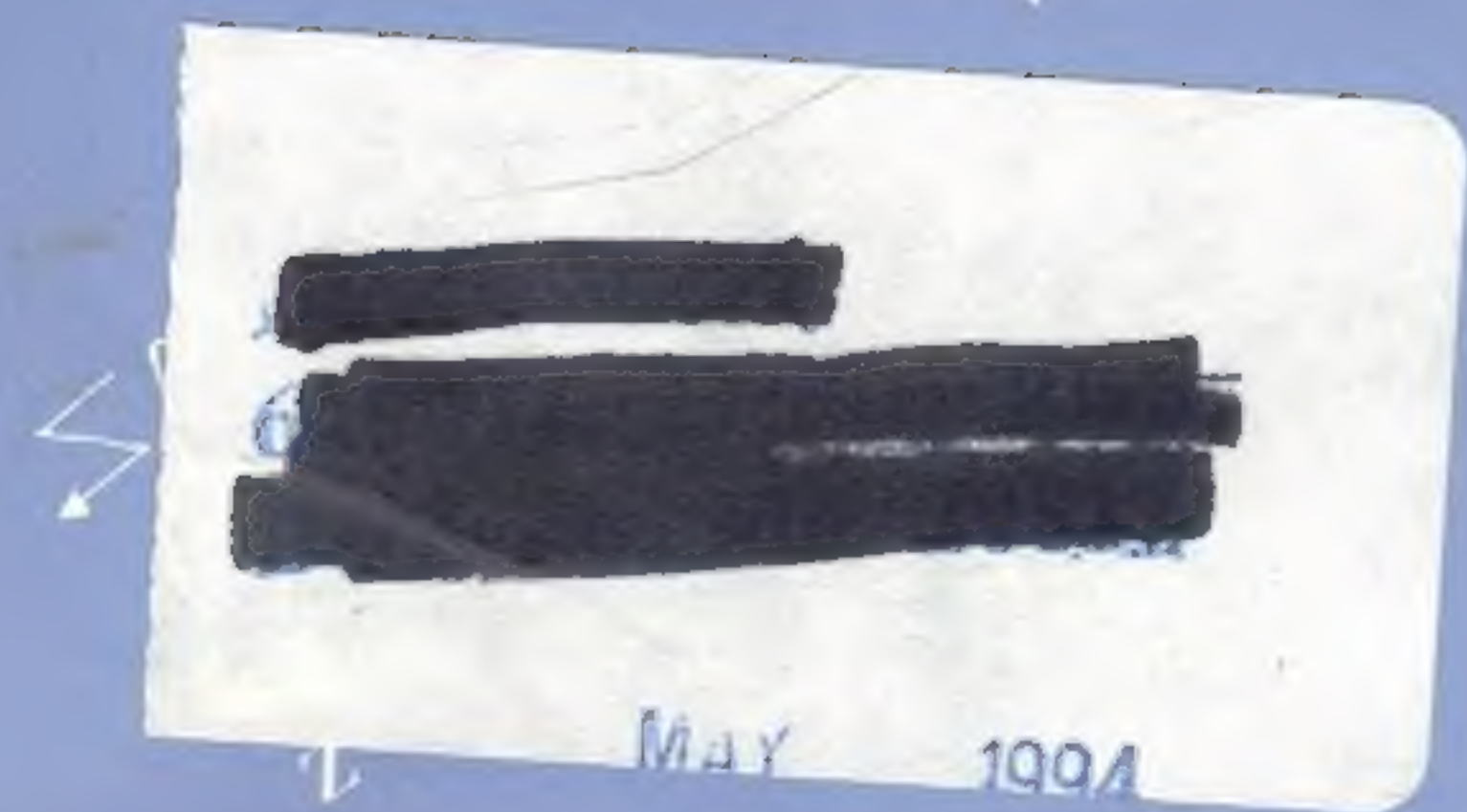
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Jean Davies Okimoto is the author of ten books for and about children. Her titles include *Jason's Women*, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, *Molly by Any Other Name*, an International Reading Association Young Adult Choice Book, and *Take a Chance, Gramps!*, a Junior Library Guild Selection. Her picture book, *Blumpoe the Grumpoe Meets Arnold the Cat*, was adapted for Shelley Duvall's television production "Bedtime Stories." She lives in Seattle, Washington, with her family and two dogs.

Doug Keith has illustrated *Max and the Houseful of Poison*, an educational flipbook by Neal Starkman, and *Nose to Toes*, by Joanne Nelson. He is also the creator of the Elfabet and Alphabat posters. Doug lives in Seattle, Washington, with his family.

The San Francisco SPCA Hearing Dog Program trains and graduates 35 hearing dogs every year and places them with hearing-impaired people. All of the student dogs are chosen from animal shelters in the Bay Area and beyond. The Hearing Dog Program, started in 1978, is funded completely through contributions; for more information write the SF/SPCA Hearing Dog Center, 2500 Twentieth Street, San Francisco, CA 94103. There are more than a dozen similar programs throughout the United States.



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